

This second letter from the apostle Paul to the assembly at Corinth was written as a follow up to the first about, perhaps, a year later. The first focused on correcting their self centered, indulgent, fleshly and worldly attitude, and disorderly conduct of their meetings. This was highlighted by their tolerance of open immorality in their midst, so he led them in judging it and putting away the offender from their midst. He responded to a number of practical questions submitted by them, about suing fellow believers, marriage, idols, etc. He urged the respect of Christ's headship to be observed, and also to be symbolized through appropriate use of head coverings. He repeated the institution of the Lord's Supper and marked the need for self judgement prior to participation. He also revealed wonderful truth regarding the unity of the body of Christ to be demonstrated by mutual love and respect both in and outside of their gathering together. Along with this he pointed out the role of the Holy Spirit and use of gifts in assembly. The truth of the resurrection of Christ, and subsequently ours, was reviewed and enlarged upon, countering false teaching amongst them. Finally, they were coached in collecting a gift for needy believers in Judea, demonstrating the unity to be seen locally also extends worldwide among assemblies of believers of all nationalities and cultures.

The second letter touches upon several of the topics introduced in the first.

- The very favorable outcome of the action putting the immoral brother outside the assembly, and guidance as to reinstatement (ch. 2 and 7);
- Some ambitious would-be leaders are still actively causing divisions among them and who now have come out more into the open and were estranging their hearts from the apostle (ch. 2 - 6, 10-12);
- More details on the resurrection (chapter 5);
- Further encouragement to ready the gift for the needy saints elsewhere (ch 8-9);
- Warnings about immorality, as yet unjudged, needed their attention (ch. 13).

This second letter is less formal, much more personal, emotional and often in the nature of fervent appeals and urgent exhortation rather than simple instruction. He uses irony often, leading to difficulty in our "getting it" sometimes. In his agitation Paul skips rapidly from subject to subject, back and forth, emotion to emotion.

He opens with relief and rejoicing upon their acceptance of his first letter and their actions in

response to it. He repeatedly expresses warm, selfless affection for them and his appreciation of every sign of a favorable attitude toward him and his ministry to them. Not that he is seeking praise or a personal following. Rather he seeks to draw them away from their human leaders to Christ. These leaders apparently had established **themselves** as "apostles" and were now actively putting Paul down in order to gain and maintain power and stature in the assembly. In doing this they were undermining the authority of the apostle and, more importantly, the principles and practical order he was used of God to teach and promote.

So Paul is led to undertake the very delicate task of reasserting his apostolic authority and defending the ministry given him by the Lord for them (and us). Elements of this appear through out the letter but become prominent from chapter 10 onward. He does this without entering into an unseemly personal attack against his "rivals," or by pitting his spiritual gifts against theirs. Rather he reasserts his apostleship and displays the marks of his faithfulness and love for the Lord, and for them, his converts. He regards the Corinthians affectionately as his own, and as a true shepherd exposes and combats enemies amongst them, wolves in sheep's clothing. They have betrayed their presence by their mocking opposition to him and their demeaning attitude toward the saints there. Paul, by contrasting their attitude and behavior with his own, exposes them for what they are. But what a delicate thing to have to do without appearing to be simply competing with them for power and position and following. As we read we will see how the Spirit leads him through this "minefield," meanwhile revealing wonderfully touching feelings of Paul's heart for them and for Christ's glory. What a sensitive, meek, humble man, to have to occupy himself with his experiences and exploits while serving his Lord. And then to let the inmost thoughts of his heart be publically exposed by the Spirit. How uncomfortable it was for him. The idea of boasting was completely foreign to Paul's heart. How Christ alone is glorified! When Paul is "pried opened" we but see Christ displayed in him. Oh what would people see if God opened our hearts and lives inside out for public display as He did Paul's? Not that Paul was sinless or immune to failure. Only Christ is. But in this epistle, especially, God presents Paul and his ministry for the Lord as the fallible example of what He desires to see in each of us. **Christ!**